

The MSP Charter Project

Background

The experience with Multi-stakeholder Partnerships (MSPs) over the last 15 years has been mixed. At the centre of this has been that there is a lack of **shared understanding of what partnerships are, how they should work, and what they should accomplish**. The MSP Charter is a tool to address this. It is meant to help create a shared vision among governments, international institutions, and stakeholders of what we aspire to when creating and working in partnerships to help achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The objective of the MSP Charter project is to enable a focused discussion on such a shared vision, and synthesize key principles in a brief document. The Charter can be used to promote principles and best practice.

The 3rd, and final version of the MSP Charter, presented below, is based on **existing agreements, research and practical experience** synthesized in various handbooks and how-to-guides, as well as a consultation process among advisory group members and a wider multi-stakeholder audience.

The Annex also includes selected **references and background material** as well as links to tools for MSP design and facilitation, knowledge management and monitoring, evaluation and learning in order to provide **implementation guidance**.

Definitions

Multi-stakeholder Partnerships for Sustainable Development are a means through which partners from different societal sectors can jointly support the transformation towards sustainable development and help achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹ In MSPs, partners engage in a co-creation process, combining resources and sharing risks so that the ownership of the partnership and its outcomes are shared among all partners.

Stakeholders are those who have an interest in a particular decision, either as individuals or representatives of a group or organisation/institution. This includes people who influence a decision, or can influence it, as well as those affected by it.²

¹ MSPs are often confused with PPPs. However, Private Public Partnerships are contractual arrangements between public agencies (federal, state, local) and private sector entities. Through this agreement, skills and assets of each sector (public, private) are shared in delivering a service or facility for the use of the general public.

² Hemmati 2002

The MSP Charter

Principles of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Sustainable Development

3rd and final version, as of December 28, 2018

The common challenge of sustainable development requires the joint commitment of all stakeholders. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are a way of joining forces, to build on the strengths of each partner, and to complement all partners' capacities and capabilities for the benefit of all.

We strive for true transformation towards realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in a joint effort to leave no one behind. We will do our utmost to adhere to the following principles for multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) for sustainable development:

Define Clear Objectives - Supporting Global Goals, National and Regional Plans

MSPs should have jointly defined specific objectives, contributing to globally agreed goals and outcomes, grounded in their local interpretation and relevance of these goals, and consistent with relevant initial conditions, strategies and policies of the countries, regions and communities where their implementation takes place.

MSPs should complement other governmental, intergovernmental, and stakeholder activities and initiatives towards the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. They serve to mobilize and combine the capacities of different stakeholders and citizens for achieving the transformative agenda on the ground. Their ambition may extend beyond national goals and regulations.

Each MSP should specify its implementation methodologies and dedicated resources, and set specific, measurable, achievable, reasonable and time bound targets for their achievement (SMART approach). MSPs should also clearly define when they are to conclude after reaching their objectives, and have an exit strategy. All partners should explicitly commit to their well-defined role in achieving the aims and objectives of the respective MSP.

All this should be captured in a written partnership agreement, endorsed by the leadership of each partner organisation, and made publicly available.

Uphold Fundamental Principles and Values

MSPs for sustainable development are based on mutual respect, trust and benefit, equity, and shared responsibility of the partners involved, taking into account the Rio Declaration Principles, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the values expressed in Agenda 2030 / 2030, respecting indigenous and local knowledge, as well as national regulations. Potential partners need to meet minimum standards, and due diligence procedures should be in place. Business partners should consider joining the [UN Global](#)

Compact. Stakeholders³ should comply with the [Istanbul Principles](#), and consider joining the [Civic Charter](#).

Apply Integrated and Systemic Approach

MSPs for sustainable development should strive to integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in their design and implementation. They should take a systemic approach, build a shared understanding of the whole system context and take this into account when devising their work program. This includes looking at all factors, their interlinkages, relevant institutions, rules and assumptions and aiming to transform all elements that need change and development in order to achieve sustainable development.

Adopt Multi-stakeholder Approach

MSPs can be arranged among any combination of partners, including international institutions, governments, regional groups, business, civil society, academia, and other stakeholders.

MSPs should in their initial stage undertake a stakeholder mapping and analysis. MSPs are inclusive in nature. All those that are affected by their work and all those that (can) influence the issues at hand need to be identified and engaged. Following the 2030 Agendas "leaving no one behind" principle, MSPs should also identify and engage marginalised groups that may be affected by their work. This may include investing in building partners' capacities such as training of specific groups.

All partners should be involved in the development of the MSP from an early stage, so that it is genuinely participatory. Yet as partnerships evolve, there should also be opportunities for additional partners to join on an equal basis if appropriate.

Levels and kinds of engagement of partners can vary – from core partners implementing activities together, through engaging in a subset of activities to participating forums of consultation.

Ensure that Form Follows Function

MSPs are the strategy of choice when individual organisations cannot tackle an issue on their own, hence they are often set up to address intractable, complex, wicked, systems-wide challenges / opportunities.

MSP designs and set-ups will be unique, and will always depend on their specific objectives and conditions under which they operate. MSPs need to invest significantly in their governance structures and their core organisations and secretariats.

Promote Good Governance

MSPs should have robust governance structures in place, including inclusive, transparent and accountable processes of preparing and making decisions, policies on actual and potential conflicts of interests, and mechanisms for resolving disputes.

MSPs for sustainable development should address potential power differences, diverse interests and potential conflict among partners in a constructive manner so as to ensure

³ Among the stakeholders formally recognized in the UN are the so-called "Major Groups" that were defined in Agenda 21, the main outcome document of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. They include the following: Women, Children and Youth, Indigenous Peoples, Non-Governmental Organizations, Local Authorities, Workers and Trade Unions, Business and Industry, Scientific and Technological Community, and Farmers.

equity, inclusiveness and fairness in all decisions and activities concerning the partnership, and harnessing lessons learned.

Promote Transparency and Accountability

MSPs for sustainable development should be developed and implemented in an open and transparent manner and in good faith. All partners are equally accountable for what they do. They are accountable to each other. Moreover, MSPs are accountable to the public. An accountability map and strategy should be developed identifying the elements of accountability relevant to the specific MSP. Both internal and external stakeholders should be engaged in this, using clear communication strategies. Subsequently, MSPs should specify arrangements to monitor and review their performance against the objectives, targets and milestones they set. Reports should be made regularly and should be made accessible to the public, including financial information. Available and/or expected sources of funding and/or investment should be clearly identified.

MSPs for sustainable development should keep relevant public institutions informed about their activities and progress in achieving their targets. Depending on the levels and topics of their work, this may include United Nations' bodies, governments at national, sub-national and/or local levels.

MSPs should actively take part in relevant review processes, sharing lessons learned about factors of success and failure, and strategies for scaling up and out.

Organisations and individuals can serve as promoters and brokers of MSPs by reaching out to potential partners, building relationships with stakeholders, and bringing them together to explore collaboration. Those who convene MSPs should adhere to the same principles to be considered legitimate conveners, champions and/or partners in MSPs.

Build Effective Communication and Leadership

Effective communication is a key success factor for MSPs. High quality facilitation and joint reflection within the partnership is required.

In successful MSPs, both formal and informal leadership roles are identified, valued and leveraged to enable the cross-sector approach.

Foster Learning

Participatory, collective learning is at the heart of MSPs. In the process of learning, different partners' perspectives become clear, and mutual understanding can grow so that diversity can indeed foster creativity and innovation, overcoming obstacles along the way to implementing objectives. MSPs should organise and foster learning loops, and secure and publish the lessons learned.